

LOCAL AUTHORITIES INITIATIVES IN SUPPORT OF AGENDA 21 – CANADA AND USA

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Summary

This topic contribution examines the experience of Canadian local authorities in support of Agenda 21. There are three major sections to this discussion; an examination of two case studies of local examples of activities explicitly related to Agenda 21, an analysis of local environmental initiatives not explicitly related to Agenda 21 and, finally, an analysis of the factors explaining the small number of Agenda 21 local initiatives in Canada.

Analysis of local environmental initiatives is organized around the five areas of local government activity used by Agenda 21 to explain the importance of the local level; infrastructure, planning, policies and regulations, participation in national and subnational (provincial) programs, and engaging with the public. The City of Ottawa and the regional municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth provide the two detailed case studies of Local Agenda 21 activity. The description of local initiatives not explicitly related to Agenda 21 illustrates that there is considerably more local activity in line with

the goals of Agenda 21 than that explicitly related to it but that the overall level of local environmental activity is uneven at best and relatively weak if compared on an international level.

The existing studies on local Agenda 21 initiatives suggest two sets of factors that can help to explain the low level of Agenda 21 initiatives in Canada; the lack of a national framework and national policies of support to local authorities and, secondly, the lack of a strong tradition of municipal autonomy in Canada.

1. Introduction

The objective of this section is to discuss the initiatives that have been taken in Canada in support of Agenda 21. This will include both those initiatives that have been explicitly linked to Agenda 21 but also those local initiatives that further the goals of Agenda 21 but without explicitly referring to Agenda 21. Following from this description, there will be an analysis of why there has been so little local activity in Canada explicitly linked to Agenda 21. There is a flourishing literature, largely European (O’Riordan and Voisey 1998, Lafferty and Eckerberg 1998, Connelly and Smith 1999, Warburton 1998, Ward 1996) which attempts to identify the factors that explain why certain countries have generated considerable local activity linked to Agenda 21 and other countries have almost no Agenda 21 local activity. The Canadian experience will be evaluated with reference to these international examples in order to give a comparative understanding to this description.

The opening paragraph of Chapter 28 (Local Authorities) of Agenda 21 lists the reasons why local authorities are important actors in working for sustainable development.

Local authorities construct, operate and maintain economic, social and environmental infrastructure, oversee planning processes, establish local environmental policies and regulations, and assist in implementing national and subnational environmental policies. As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development (28.1).

This quotation indicates five areas of municipal activity which impact significantly on the local capacity to move toward sustainable development:

- infrastructure responsibilities
- planning
- environmental policies and regulations
- participation in national and subnational policies
- engaging with the public (education, mobilization, promotion)

The last category - underlining the importance of linkages between the citizenry and local government - is central to Agenda 21. Active citizenship is essential to achieving sustainable development and local governance is seen as a level of government with enormous potential for involving citizens. Sustainable development will only come about if citizens pressure their government to act and, at the same time, participate

directly in government programs.

The case studies will be organized around these five areas of activity. At the same time, it is also important to understand questions of overall political commitment and resource allocation and these, from the point of view of elected officials, the municipal bureaucracy and the public. These initiatives have to be evaluated both as sets of discrete programs and activities but also in terms of their overall dimensions and directions.

2. Canadian Initiatives in Support of Agenda 21

These are only a limited number of local initiatives in Canada that are explicitly linked to Agenda 21. The two most significant are those of Ottawa and of Hamilton-Wentworth. The example of Hamilton-Wentworth was one of the fourteen case studies analyzed by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) in its Model Communities Program (ICLEI 1998) and the only Canadian example in the ICLEI study.

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Der Hoeven, F. Van and H.J. Rosemann, (2006) *Urban Transformations and Sustainability*, Delft university Press, 144pp. [Collectively the papers contained in this book represent new ideas on how best cities can develop in a changing global environment to avoid the problems of the past while anticipating new challenges in a fast changing global environment.]

Alberta's Clean Air Strategic Alliance (CASA) (<http://www.cleanair.web.net/>); Ontario Clean Air Alliance (OCAA) (<http://www.casahome.org/>); Southern Alliance for Clean Air (SACA) (<http://www.cleanenergy.org/>). [Almost all provinces and States have private or semi-private organizations committed to air quality management, Air quality Alliance groups. Although some of the

initiatives arose from industry concern over possible enactment of “tough” air quality standards by governments, their programs provide useful insight into the conflict between rapid economic growth and sound environmental practice. The websites listed are examples of alliances operating in Canada and the United States available on the Internet.]

Biographical Sketches

Caroline Andrew B.A. (B.C.) MScSoc (Laval) Ph. D. (Toronto) teaches Political Science at the University of Ottawa where she is full professor. Her areas of research interest are in municipal politics, urban development and women and local politics. She sits on the boards of the Lower-Town Resource Centre in Ottawa and of Interpares. She is currently Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa.

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